

Wayne C. Henderson Stage Funding Announcement (July 5, 2005)

Mouth of Wilson, Virginia

I am pleased to visit the Grayson Highlands State Park this morning to announce a provision of federal funding which will support the Annual Wayne C. Henderson Music Festival and Guitar Competition and advance the tourism economy of Grayson County.

As a key component of our regional economic development strategy, we are placing a major emphasis on expanding tourism. It holds great promise for our region. It is our greatest untapped economic resource.

A shining example of our region's tourism potential can be found here at the Grayson Highlands State Park which hosts each year the Wayne Henderson Music Festival and Guitar Competition. Southwest Virginia enjoys the highest mountains, and the best hiking, backpacking, hunting and fishing opportunities to be found in the Commonwealth of Virginia, all of which can be seen at Grayson Highlands State Park. In addition, the Blue Ridge mountain region of our state is the birthplace of traditional American music and bluegrass. In our mountains, we blended the music of the Celtic lands of Scotland and Ireland, with harmonies from Europe and Africa, to form something truly new and unique. Each year, our musical heritage is celebrated here during the Wayne Henderson Music Festival here at the Park, and attendance is high at this popular festival. Today, we take an important step to advance Wayne's festival and provide to the Park a facility that can be used for a variety of events beyond the annual festival.

At my request, the Appalachian Regional Commission has agreed to provide federal funding which will benefit both the Park and the Wayne Henderson Festival. Effective today, a federal grant in the amount of \$50,000 is being made to the Wayne C. Henderson Festival Organization to enable the construction of a performance stage at the Grayson Highlands State Park. The stage will be used each year during the Music Festival and Guitar Competition and for other cultural events and educational workshops held at the Park during its operating season. Work will begin soon in constructing the performance stage, and it is expected that the stage will be completed in September.

The Music Festival and Guitar Competition began here at the Grayson Highlands State Park in 1995, and it is held each year on the third Saturday of June. The event features some of the region's best traditional musicians and is an outstanding experience for visitors to enjoy the traditional mountain music which originated in our region. Last year, approximately 1,500 people visited the Park to take part in Wayne's festival or to simply take in the sounds of the music.

Wayne lives in nearby Rugby. He is a National Heritage Award recipient who has performed nationally and in seven other nations throughout Europe, Asia and Africa in the "Masters of the Steel-String Guitar" tour.

Wayne is also very well known because of the instruments that he makes. His guitars and mandolins are sought after by

musicians throughout the world for their high quality, and a perpetual waiting list exists of both the famous and not-so-famous alike, who wish to purchase one of Wayne's instruments. Wayne is a true treasure to Southwest Virginia, and the Music Festival and Guitar Competition which he hosts each year has become a welcome tradition here at the Grayson Highlands State Park.

The total cost of construction for the Wayne C. Henderson Performance Stage is \$125,000. In addition to the federal funding which I am announcing today, an application is pending with the Virginia Tobacco Commission for a grant in the amount of \$25,000. A local match of \$50,000 will be provided through in-kind services being provided by the Grayson Highlands State Park and the Wayne Henderson Festival Organization. The Park will be performing all of the necessary grading work on the property that is necessary before construction on the stage can begin, and volunteers will perform all of the labor to construct the performance stage.

The stage will be constructed approximately 100 yards uphill from the existing staging area in the Homestead area here at the Park. The site will be approximately 1,224 square feet in size and will include space for three dressing rooms and a musician warm-up room. The stage itself will occupy approximately 352 square feet of space. The performance stage will be accessible for the handicapped and will also have restroom facilities that will be connected to the existing sewer system at the Grayson Highlands State Park. The Tobacco Commission funds, if approved, would be used to connect the infrastructure of the Park to the stage.

The exterior of the stage will resemble a barn or cabin, with hemlock board and batten siding and a cedar shake roof which will match the existing structures of the Park. Ample lawn seating that is naturally sloped to provide an optimal amphitheater experience will be available to visitors .

In addition to the federal funds which I am announcing today, I am currently seeking additional federal funding to enable the purchase and installation of a sound system for the new performance stage. The sound system will greatly enhance the experience for visitors during the Music Festival and Guitar Competition, among other events, and I hope to have the opportunity to announce these additional funds in the near future.

I will now take the opportunity of these remarks to recognize several individuals who have been instrumental in the success which we are announcing today.

Bill Shelton, Director of the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development, and Joe Blevins, Community Representative for the Department, have taken the lead in helping to develop the Wayne Henderson Performance Stage project. Their efforts have spurred this project from the beginning, and I thank them for their work.

I also want to thank Harvey Thompson, Park Manager at Grayson Highlands State Park, and Joe Elton, Director of the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation, for their outstanding support of this project.

I also want to recognize Joe Wilson, Executive Director for the National Council for the Traditional Arts, for the technical assistance he is providing in our efforts to obtain federal funding to purchase and install a sound system at the new performance stage.

Debbie Robinson, Director of Tourism for the City of Galax, and Keith Barker, Assistant City Manager for the City of Galax, also deserve our thanks this morning for their strong support of this project.

I also want to thank David Schwartz, an architect with Lane Engineering, for lending his expertise to this project.

I also want to recognize my District Director, Laura Lee, for her persistent and persuasive work in seeking these federal funds.

Finally, I want to thank Wayne Henderson without whom we would not be here today. Wayne has shown a true commitment to the preservation of the musical culture of our region, and his efforts have influenced a generation of musicians, from the internationally famous to our region's young people. I would now like to recognize Wayne to offer some remarks.